



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman

STAFF REPORT



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

July 8, 2010

REQUEST: City Council Bill #10-0524/ Campaign Signs in Residential Areas- Repeal of Maximum-Size Restriction

For the purpose of repealing the maximum-size restriction for campaign signs erected in residential areas.

RECOMMENDATION: Disapproval.

STAFF: Anthony Cataldo

INTRODUCED BY: Councilmembers Conaway, Middleton and Welch

HISTORY

There have been no previous Planning Commission actions related to this specific subject; however this specific section of the City Code was added in 2007 with Ordinance 07-430.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

This action does not directly relate to the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan.

ANALYSIS

Purpose: This bill seeks to eliminate the sixteen square foot maximum-size restriction that currently governs campaign signs in residentially zones areas. This proposed text change relates to Article 19-*Police Ordinances*, in the Baltimore City Code.

Article 19 Police Ordinances, Changes: This bill eliminates Subtitle 46-3 *Maximum size*.

(a) In general.

No sign erected under this subtitle may exceed an area of 16 square feet.

(b) Computing area.

A sign's area shall be computed as provided in §11-203 of the City Zoning Code.

Neighborhood Aesthetic Issues:

- Staff understands that campaign candidates often use signs near election times in order to draw attention to their candidacy and running platforms. The current size restriction allows for the integrity of the City's residential areas to be retained. Large campaign signs in residential areas add visual clutter and do not aesthetically relate to the neighborhoods in which they reside. Baltimore City is comprised of more than forty

National and Local Historic Districts. A key component of these, and all neighborhoods, is being able to see the homes and grounds; to be able to experience and appreciate the atmosphere of the setting which you are in. Large campaign signs distract from this environment and have the potential to have homes erect out of scale signage that effectively acts as a billboard within a neighborhood; adding to the existing proliferation of signage throughout the City. Rowhome communities are also especially at risk as many homes are less than sixteen feet wide and on narrow streets with limited, if any, front yard and narrow sidewalks. Block character could easily be adversely impacted with large campaign signs that overwhelm the neighborhood.

Public Safety/Traffic Issues:

- Large campaign signs act as distractions for motorists, particularly along major neighborhood connection corridors and streets. The appearance of signs in close proximity to the roadway, the battle for attention between directional or instructional traffic, and the proliferation of signs as one drives around the City all serve to sway drivers' focus from the road to the campaign signs. Safety for not only other motorists, but also pedestrians and children on neighborhood sidewalks and streets are at risk.
- The high rate of speed on certain City roadways, when paired with the visual distractions of large campaign signs can also be dangerous for pedestrians.
- The numerous curb cuts and roadway intersections along City streets, especially on dense residential streets, already create numerous decision-making points for motorists. Large campaign signs, by their very nature, are designed to attract the driver's eye, and only add to the difficulty of driving safely.
- Signs in residential areas without limits could generate signage the size of bill boards, which is already not appropriate.

Sustainability:

- Larger, temporary signs which are more difficult to recycle go against Resource Conservation, *Goal 3- Minimize The Production of Waste* of the Baltimore Sustainability Plan.

Notification:

- Notice of this hearing was sent to 760 City-wide active community organizations and all City Council members.

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